



Backcountry Food Storage Policy Update April 2012

Proper backcountry food storage is essential and legally required in order to safeguard the health and safety of visitors and wildlife, and is crucial to maintaining the park's wilderness character. Human food is an attractive source of calories for many animals, including rodents, marmots, goats, bears, deer, etc. There are many camping areas in North Cascades National Park Complex where it is either exceedingly difficult or completely impossible to store food properly, in a manner sufficient to satisfy park food storage regulations. In many of these areas food storage violations have resulted in wildlife that is becoming conditioned to human food.

To protect visitors and wildlife and to provide clear direction for food storage in challenging locations, during 2011 the North Cascades National Park proposed phasing in the mandatory use of approved portable hard-sided food storage canisters for specific areas (not the entire park) beginning in 2012. During the summer of 2011, public comment produced new policy questions regarding some unapproved food storage strategies (for example, the efficacy of Ursack products, electric fences, etc.). Therefore, park regulations for proper food storage remain unchanged and the implementation of canister requirements are being delayed while some of these methods are being researched and tested.

Currently there are only two approved methods for storing food and scented items in the backcountry: hanging (minimum 10 feet off the ground, 4 feet from any tree limb or trunk) or using an approved hard-sided container.

Areas under consideration for mandatory food storage canisters include: Desolation, Fireweed, Fisher, Hooter, Junction, Monogram, North Fork, Pierce Mountain, Sahale Glacier, Sourdough, Thornton Lakes, Thunder Basin, Trapper Inlet, and Whatcom camps as well as Boston Basin, Hidden Lake, and Tapto Lakes cross-country zones.

These areas have been selected for one or more of the following factors:

- 1) hanging food is either very difficult or impossible due to the nature of the vegetation or lack of trees suitable for hanging;
- 2) wildlife have obtained food from a hang and have become human-food-conditioned, making hanging food risky and merely a delaying mechanism; and
- 3) presence of bears and/or other wildlife is high.

Ursacks and electric fences are not currently approved as proper food storage devices on their own. Ursack products have been shown to fail in protecting food from both bears and rodents. The latest Ursack model, with aluminum liner, and the use of portable electric fencing are being considered for approval.

To provide feedback or to discuss comments, questions or concerns, please contact the Wilderness Information Center at (360) 854-7245 or email noca_wilderness@nps.gov.